Depot Town Rag

March 1996

100% FREE Rag Content

- Bill paid
- Dog news
- Rubber Duckies
- PRIDE cleans up
- Fred & Janice Karpo
- Auto boasts, boosts, & busts

and other strictly local stuff . . .

Volume 19, Number 3 *"All the news in one block in one month."*

A Publication of the DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. P.O. Box 970-235, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197-0804

Changing the rules

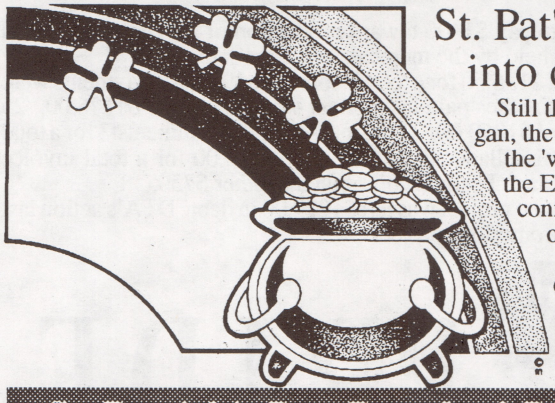
Back in 1975, when they were writing the original Constitution and bylaws for the Depot Town Association, getting registered with the State of Michigan as a nonprofit incorporation was paramount. Then came the official tax-exempt status with a 501(c)3 rating. The final stroke was when the local press began identifying the group acronymically. When we were simply called 'DTA,' we knew we had made it.

By the early Eighties, DTA had to broaden its bylaws to accommodate so many members, volunteers, and well-wishers. Quarterly meetings were added to include everybody while the monthly meetings carried on the more mundane business.

In the Nineties, the Association amended their bylaws for 'indemnification,' so firmly established were they that they needed to protect their officers from their own success.

The current proposal to further adapt the bylaws will make changes in the types of memberships available, putting the most emphasis yet on DTA being run by business and building owners in the local community.

After more than a year of study and planning, the March 21 meeting should decide it all.

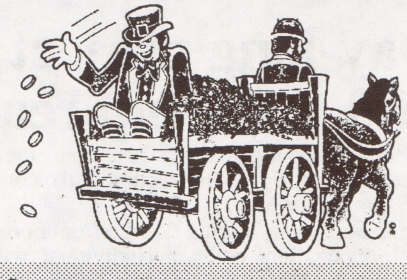


St. Pat's Parade to spill into depot district again

Still the only such event in the State of Michigan, the third St. Patrick's Day parade will come the 'wrong way' down East Cross Street from the EMU campus and end in the friendly confines of Depot Town. An annual project of the Gaelic League of Ypsilanti, the parade has drawn thousands of revelers, dancers, bands, and green-wearing, shamrock-carrying, song-singing, smiling Irishmen and women.

Ypsilanti loves a parade!

St. Patrick's Day Parade, 2 P.M., Sunday, 17 March



Customer Survey due this month

A survey will be in shopper's hands soon, thanks to a combined effort of DTA and EMU officials. Copies of the two-sider will be distributed throughout the district this month.

Here's a sampling of the survey questions:

1. How often do you do business in Depot Town?
2. How far do you travel to visit Depot Town?
3. What are the main types of businesses you utilize in Depot Town?
4. Where do you do most of your shopping?
5. Why do you choose to do most of your shopping in that area?
6. (List of 20 characteristics decribing Depot Town) Indicate if you think each is GOOD, FAIR, or POOR.
7. (List of things to improve Depot Town). Indicate which you think are VERY IMPORTANT, SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT, or NOT IMPORTANT.
8. ,Is there anything that could be done to encourage you to do business in Depot Town more often?
9. What types of new businesses or activities would you personally use if they were availabale in Depot Town?
10. What types of events would you like to see at Frog Island?
11. What types of events would you like to see at the Freighthouse?
12. Please name three words that you think best describe Depot Town.

The completed surveys may be returned via mail or in person to DTA president David French at the Sidetrack (56 E. Cross).

Watch for yours and be sure to respond!

Didn't they used to live down here?

Players revive Simon's *Plaza Suite*

The Ypsilanti Players unveil their production of a perennial Broadway favorite, Neil Simon's *Plaza Suite* on Friday, March 1. A play in three acts, each act provides a window into the lives of a set of characters who take a suite at New York City's Plaza Hotel.

Directors Henri Price and Angie Prince and their cast have taken Simon's hilariously cynical classic and given it new life. Price and Prince have crafted a performance which meets and exceeds the standard of excellence which the Ypsilanti Players have created for themselves in the course of their run as the oldest continuously performing theater group in Michigan.

This hit is actually a suite of three plays, the plots of which could just as easily have occurred in some of the apartments down in Depot Town over the past few years:

Act I introduces us to a suburban couple who take a suite at the Plaza while their house is being painted, and it turns out to be the same one in which they honeymooned 23 (or was it 24?) years ago. A wry tale of marriage in tatters.

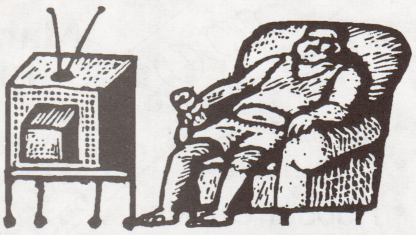
Act II shows us a Hollywood producer who, after three marriages, is looking for fresh fields, so he calls up a childhood sweetheart for a little sexual diversion. In the intervening years she has idolized him from afar, and is now more than the match he bargained for.

Act II shows us the same suite, with a mother and father fighting among themselves over the best way to get their daughter out of the bathroom and down to the ballroom where guests await.

Whether in New York City or Ypsilanti's Depot Town, Simon's plots are still intriguing and entertaining.

Plaza Suite will be performed the weekends of March 1 and March 8 at the Little Theatre, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 120 N. Huron Street, Ypsilanti.

Friday and Saturday performances begin at 8:00; Sunday matinees begin at 2:00. Tickets are $8.00 for Friday and Saturday, $6.50 for matinee performances. Reduced price tickets are available for senior citizens and groups of ten or more. Tickets can be bought in advance at Carty's Music. For additional information: Linda Campbell at 484-1470.



"Hey, Martha! Lookit this. Depot Town's on the TV!"

Association picks up the Cable TV advertising bill

Back in 1994, 29 businesses on the block rallied to support a plan for cable television ad offered by Omnicom and Columbia Cable. Viewers around southeastern Michigan marveled at how good this little block looked on their home TV screens and many of them came down to check out the neighborhood. Around the district, storekeepers reported seeing an increase in street traffic, directly attributable to that short spot they had jointly sponsored.

As of last month, $580.00 was still outstanding in the merchants' account which was set up to pay the expenses for that bill and DTA resolved to pick up the tab. Eight businesses were represented among those who did not keep their obiligation and, of those, four have gone out of business and four are still on the block.

From the final report: DTA agreed to pay $1400 toward production of the commercial and would be repaid from a fundrasier to be held by the merchats at a later date.

The 29 businesses agreed to pay a total of $136.50 for a total income of $3958.50. Payments were to be made in three installments. 28 businesses paid installment #1 for a total of $1176.00, 25 businesses paid installment #2 for a total of $1050.00, 21 businesses paid installment #3 for a total of $1102.00, and one business paid a miscellaneous installment of $50.00 for a total invoice income of $3378.50. A check from Heritage Festival contributed another $750.

After production expenses of $5347.50, the project was left $1219.00 in debt. DTA's action last month finally closed the books on this promotions project.

Antique Engine Club CLASSIFIEDS

FOR SALE OR TRADE:
Small Universal Tool & Cutter Grinder. Ideal for small shop. Like NEW -- half of new price. Paul Brown: 697-0380.

•

FOR SALE: 4 X 4 two-hole outhouse. Hand built, new but old looking. Bill Farnum, 527 Pine, Wyandotte, MI 48192. 284-0306.

•

WANTED: Small hand-crank, clamp-on corn shellers. Also, always looking for unusual horse bits. Phyllis Kasper, 941-4091.

•

FOR SALE: Have recently acquired a good selection of graphite and teflon steam and pump rod packing. By the foot or spool. Sizes from 1/8" to 1". Square and round. Larry Massey, 981-4973.

•

WANTED: Air shroud and tank for AAU Continental engine. Air shroud and tank for Johnson Utilitor motor. Bob Cook, 697-4457.

•

WANTED: 3-horse electric motor, 220V, single phase. Gary Kruse, 483-2150

P.R.I.D.E.

Day-long project to get Ypsi city and township ready for summer

"People Restoring Image & Developing the Environment" (PRIDE) is the theme chosen by a task force representing a cross-section of the community to clean and pick up the City and Township on Saturday, 18 May.

From boat crews towing flotsam from Ford Lake, to roadside scavengers at the freeway entries, local organizations, clubs, and individuals will be getting rid of the winter collection of debris along the area's roadsides, parking lots, and open spaces.

Depot Towners see this as another opportunity to ready their flower beds for spring planting, and a good time to get the whole neighborhood out to prepare their many parking lots for the influx of clientele who will descend upon its sidewalk cafés, festivals, and daily shopping and dining.

"Business is picking up," says the brochure from the committee organized by Rick, president of Society Bank. Other organizations pledged to join the huge one-day event are:

Every organization and individual in the area is encouraged to register their 'target area' with the Ypsilanti Area Vistor & Convention Bureau. Call Lisa at the VCB: 483-4444.

RAE MAE:

Dear Depot Town *Rag*,

Last Saturday (10 February) morning my sons and I visited the Farmer's Market for our usual half hour of folk music. Afterwards, rather than go right home we decided to go and play on "our" Red Caboose. The weather was mild and there wasn't much wind, so it was pretty pleasant standing by listening to them explain the intricate workings of their caboose. They climbed on and off, leaned under it and walked all around chattering away at each other and at me.

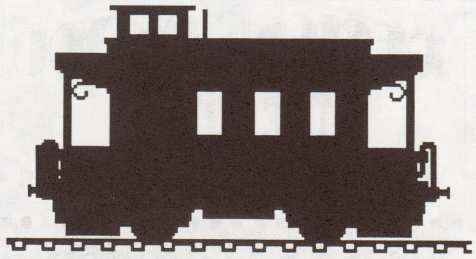
Unfortunately, I couldn't just relax and let them explore. I noticed immediately the quantities of dog excrement left at the bottom step of the caboose and on every grassy spot on the plaza. Fresh and freeze-dried, it covers the grass beside the caboose, it's piled beneath the trees, and in the garden bed. It is everywhere and it is disgusting.

New York City has an ordinance about scooping up the poop and, as a result, people by the millions have adopted clean practices when walking their dogs. But does there have to be a law?

I would like to appeal to the dog owners who live in Depot Town and other regulars to 1) learn to carry plastic bags and pick up their dog's "business" after it goes every time! And 2) to *please* clean up the accumulated mess soon so more visitors to Depot Town and locals like us don't go home with s— on their shoes.

Sincerely, -Lise Anderson, Maple St.

THERE'S WORK TO BE DONE.
Ypsilanti's Operation P.R.I.D.E. will see citizens in the City and Township turn out to clean up the area for summertime!
Saturday, 18 May 1996
Saturday, 18 May, 1996
...after the PRIDE day,
IT'S TIME TO
PLANT
YPSILANTI



Dateline: Depot Town

A Neighborhood Forgotten by Time (and Life and Newsweek)

Old motto still sticks

Not too many years ago last month when Conrail employees pushed the 100-year-old Grand Trunk Caboose into its final stop in Depot Town, the folks in the block adopted yet another slogan, hoping it would bode as well for the venerable old rail car/office as it would for the Association which had purchased it.

"Firmly rooted in the past - with a clear view forward," was the rallying cry that accompanied fund-raisers to purchase the old relic, and it certainly worked. Actives in the old railroad district had never mounted such a campaign before and were astonished at how quickly the bucks started coming back to that newly-carved mail slot in the south-facing door.

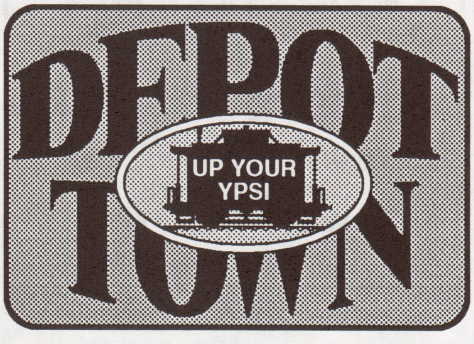
The City notified DTA that they'd need permit -- or something -- for things like the installation of electicity, but remain puzzled over the fact that a caboose is not a building. Instead, they labeled it a 'monument.'

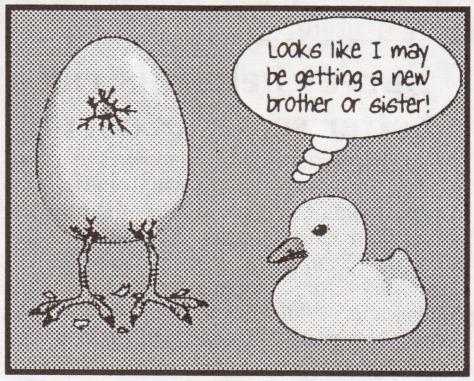
Another difficulty arose when the U.S. Post Office tried to deliver mail. It wasn't really on a street, either, and the little dirt path that led back into the old rail yard and out to Forest Avenue was often called Rice Street, sometimes called Race Street. There were other Rices and Races in the area and, since there were no other addresses on it, the City Manager suggested they call the entire triange being developed from the caboose to the Freighthouse "Market Place."

The name stuck and the caboose quickly became the locus of Kidsart, the Antique Engine Club, jazz events, and the source for the electricity which would light the newly erected 'welcome' sign on the west wall of the Follett House.

In 1994, DTA leased the caboose to the Ypsilanti Police Department to be used as a ministation and it conitinued that way for nearly a year. Since last October, however, the caboose has not been used by the Police, and there has been a dispute over responsibility for the electric bill.

Things to argue about are nothing new on this block, and the caboose's motto still seems to fit the mood and tempo of the Nineties. We're stuck in a part of the Nineteenth century -- and we're looking far into the future from our unique vantage point.





Rubber Ducky Race up for grabs

"I would urge the Depot Town Association to submit a proposal detailing how they would meet Spirit of Ypsilanti's set criteria," said Lewis Hamlett, chair of this year's Ypsilanti Heritage Festival.

Those criteria include:

- ability to obtain a State lottery license
- financial ability to operate the race
- available manpower and recruits
- ability to purchase inventory
- show how profits will be allocated

At its February meeting, DTA started filling in the blanks, hoping to operate the popular event at this year's August Festival. If they succeed, most of the block will need to be included in the plan to sell tickets, stage the actual event, and clean up the Huron River afterwards.

Sisters hold open house

Me 'n' My Sisters' Country Store will feature a 'brown bag cookie art and paper-casting' demonstration at their March 8, 9, and 10 open house at their greatly expanded shop at 13 East Cross Street.

The special demonstration is to be held on Sunday, only, from 2-5 P.M.

They encourage shoppers to stop in for a cup of the Coffee Master's Gourmet Coffee and peruse their fine line of whole-bean coffee.

'Tank tanks' showing summer previews

Not all those off-season tans on the block are on people just returning from Floriday, Arizona, or the Caribbean. Some of them are on folks who've been right here in Michigan all winter long -- but found their 'rays' at the several tanning centers on the block.

Depot Doo's remodeling more than a year ago added a whole building bay on the north side of the street dedicated to tanning beds tucked neatly into booths. They were immediately popular with winter snowbirds who had to stay up north.

Last year saw stand-up tanning booths added to the plan for the extensive remodeling and expansion at Richard Reid's Hair Station on the south side of the street and they have been busy since their opening the past two months.

Market News & Interviews

Karpos bring fresh goods straight from their farm

-Judy Andrews

This month we are featuring another vendor from your local Ypsilanti Farmers' Market: Fred and Janice Karpo of Karpo Farms. This is a 100-acre family farm just north of Tipton, Michigan, in the Irish Hills area.

Fred and Janice began coming to the Market in 1979 when the Farmers' Market opened in Depot Town. On the 20 acres they set aside for farming, they planted fruit trees, berries and a variety of vegetables. While they waited for the trees to bear fruit, they sold their berries and vegetables at the Market. After their orchard matured, the vegetables were phased out and the most wonderful, tasty Michigan-grown fruits started to appear.

Fred and Janice offer 26 different varieties of apples throughout the year. There are also peaches, plums, apricots, cherries and berries when in season.

Janice soon began the process of getting a State-inspected licensed kitchen in order to make her jams, jellies, and baked goods to bring to Market. And it's real homemade stuff!

They also offer farm-fresh eggs from their neighbor's farm, cider pressed from their own apples and this year they will be going back to their roots by planting a variety of vegetables to bring to Market.

Their eldest son, Toby, has for years been coming to sell at the Market and soon they may be incorporating their second son, Steve, to do the same.

Did you know that, during the Christmas Holiday season, they offer specialty fruit baskets and Janice takes special orders on her baked goods at any time? She will even reduce the amount of sugar or use whole wheat flour in a recipe for you. Check it out. They are very accommodating. That's why we love them!

Farmers' Market: Wednesday 9A.M.-4:30P.M., Saturday 7A/M/-3P.M.

Depot Town Association, Inc.

DTA: Firmly rooted in the past - with a clear view forward!

DTA: 15 February 1996

Minutes of November and January approved.

Treasury report approved.

Committee Reports:

• **DDA:** The association is looking to purchase property as well as entertaining other ideas. Next meeting 4 March 1996 at 8 A.M. at the Freighthouse.

• **Merchants:** Carole Clare, as treasurer of DTA, asked that the issue of balance merchants owe from (cable TV ad) video be settled. The oustanding debt was voted to be forgiven with only one opposed.

• **Farmers' Market Advisory:** Bathrooms are almost complete. The lighting in the main section should be installed soon. Rafters have been cleaned. Outside lighting on the west side of the building is in the works. New signs were made; one for the south corner of the building and one at the north end. An Easter Silent Auction is being discussed.

Unfinished Business:

• **Letterhead** for DTA passed around. Some changes suggested.

• **Bylaws committee** reported on their progress. Proposed changes to include Article IV, Section 2 - Change number of categories of membership from three types to two types, with elimination of Associate memberships.

Article VII, Section 2 - Change term of officers from one year duration to two years. In addition, in order to hold office, individuals must be members of DTA.

(See p. 2 of amendments for other proposals)

Bylaws with amendment changes will be polished and bylaw committee will distribute to members. Bylaws with changes will be up for a vote at March's meeting.

• **Rubber Ducky Race** was discussed. Details to be worked out at a meeting of the Executive Council.

• **Car Show** planned for 4 May is progressing on schedule. Pancake breakfast on that date will be organized by DTA.

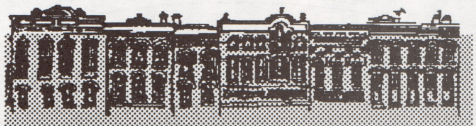
New Business:

• **Marketing Survey:** Kendra Buntrock, associated with Eastern Michigan University, is doing a five-year plan for the DTA. This survey will include a business owners' survery as well as a customer survey. Surveys should reach business owners soon.

• **Ypsilanti PRIDE Week** will be observerd by a coordinated effort of volunteers to clean thte Depot Town area on May 18.

• **Panhandler** frequenting the area was discussed. Terry McDonald to check with foster home where the individual resides to help curb this problem.

Next meeting: 21 March 1996 at 6P.M. at Renewed Interest Antiques.



THE DEPOT TOWN RAG

A publication of the Depot Town Association, Inc. a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to preserving the unique character of the neighborhood and to the enhancement of its business climate. -Tom Dodd, editor

The Depot Town Association, Inc.
David French, president
P.O. Box 970-235
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197-0804

The Depot Town Rag
Tom Dodd, editor
1680 Cliffs Landing
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198-7305

Depot Town Association 1996 officers:

President -
David French

Vice president (president elect) -
Sandy Hoag

Secretary -
Judy Julie

Treasurer -
Carol Clare

Next DTA meeting:
6 P.M., Thursday, 21 March 1996
at Renewed Interest Antique
33 East Cross Street

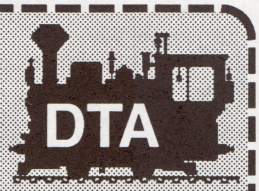
Current membership in the Depot Town Association:

Blue River Tool
Blue River Tool
Chamber of Commerce
Clare, Carole
Davis, Dave
Depot Town Travel
Fabrizio, Arlene
Farmer, Cheryl
Fennel, Bill
Fine, Bonita
Finn's JM&J Insurance
Finn, Sharon (Ike's Barbershop)
Freeman & Bunting
French, Bill
French, Dave
French, Linda
French, Sandy
Fries, G & G
Hamblin, Pam
Hansen, Carol
Harley, T & R
Knox, Brenda
Kors, Vernon
Luke, Linda
Manchester, Tom
McClellan, C.
McCrary, Marcia
McKeever, Carolyn
McKeever, Gary
Me & My Sisters
Me & My Sisters, Margaret
Miller Motors, Jack
Millers Ice Cream
Monaghan, Judi
Mood, D & D
Muscato, Kathleen
Oney Properties, Margaret
Otis, B & W
Parish House
Parkes, Randy
O'Halloran, Carol
Porter, John
Reid, Marion
Reid, Richard
Remington-Walker, S&J
Remington-Walker, S & M
Renewed Interest
Rintamaki, J & M
Rintamaki, Randy
Serenity House
Shaw, Bob
Steele, Tom
Symons, R & P
Teachers Shop
Thompson, William
Woodside, R & F
Yohn, Linda

DTA Life Memberships:

Barr, Marlene
City of Ypsilanti, Community Development
Dodd, Bettie
Dodd, Lorna
Dodd, Tom
EMU Depot Town Center
First of America, Jonelle Jackson
French, Gerry
Kovalak, James
O'Dell, Arvin
Rosen-Fine, Bonni & Ed

Please include me among the members of
The Depot Town Association, Inc.



Name _____
Street _____
City _____ State _____ ZIP _____
I'm available to help with Association projects. Call me at _____

Annual dues:
- ❑ $25 Regular Voting Member (Property or business owner)
- ❑ $10 Associate Member (Interested in and supportive)
- ❑ $100 Life Member (A great deal if you had joined in 1976!)
- ❑ Please place my name on the monthly mailing list of *The Depot Town Rag*.
- ❑ Don't mail *The Rag*. I'll pick it up in the neighborhood.
- ✂ Clip and send check to "Depot Town Association"
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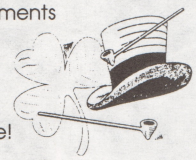


Located In The Heart of Depot Town

Celebrating America's 100th Anniversary of the Auto

Auto-theft sting ends in chase

-from the *Ann Arbor News*, 26 January 1996

"An undercover auto-theft sting operation didn't work out exactly the way it was planned early today, when the driver of a stolen car led officers from several departments on a chase from Ypsilanti Township to Dearborn. According to preliminary reports, Washtenaw County Sheriff's deputies had set up a sting to buy a stolen 1995 Ford Escort. The operation was to be staged in a parking lot near Michigan Avenue and Ecorse Road, but as the suspect approached in the vehicle, he became suspicious and sped away. The chase ended about 1:10 A.M. when the suspect crashed in Dearborn. He was treated for a cut on his head, then jailed."

The rest of the story:

DTA officer's car boosted

Carol Clare who, when she's not balancing the books for the Depot Town Association, is the Ypsilanti City Assessor. She and a friend had parked in front of Old Towne Coin & Gold and walked to the Sidetrack for dinner. As she drove her friend home, they were apparently followed by the perpetrators who stole the car while Carol visited at the friend's home. Not locking the doors due to the freezing rain that evening, Carol made the mistake of leaving her brief case with check book and credit cards in her car's back seat.

"It was just going to be a short visit, and I didn't think a thing about it," says the DTA treasurer, noting that Ypsilanti's tax records were not included with her stash.

After the crash in Dearborn, the driver, from Madison Heights, was arrested. Further implications over the use of Clare's stolen credit cards brought about the apprehension of his passenger, a young man from Ypsilanti Township whose grandmother lives on Miles Street near Depot Town.

Police stated that most cars are stolen when you are followed home from a shopping area or restaurant parking lot. "They steal your car," they said, "when you go inside for the evening."

Clare's car probably won't ever make it to the Auto Museum.

DTA, page 5 , March 1996

Better than the mythical 'Solid Gold Cadillac'

Golden Hudson added to automobile museum's exhibits

Depot Town's Auto Museum proudly shows off the 1946 Golden Jubilee Hudson which starred in both Detroit's 50th and 100th Auto Show celebrations. Depot Town's full-time promoter and entrepreneur, Jack Miller, has been instrumental in the placement of that unique and historical automobile and has received recognition in car aficianado circles across the country. As a kid who grew up at his Dad's garage down in the old railroad district, Miller has been a permanent fixture in the life of the neighborhood for many years and has been a repositor of information and a part of the local folklore, himself.

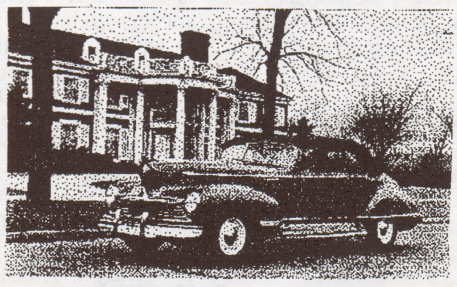
Jenny King's article in *Old Cars Weekly News & Marketplace* tells the most recent story best:

Golden Jubilee Hudson appeared at Detroit show

-Jenny King

It's kind of like Christmas sneaking up and taking us by surprise each year. Even with plenty of lead time, many observers of the 100th anniversary of the auto industry get caught short.

That's the way it seemed when Jack Miller, of Miller Motors in Ypsilanti, Mich., began a heated search shortly before New Year's Day. He was looking for someone to get a special vehicle into the 1996 North American International Auto Show in Detroit the following week.



The 1946 Hudson Super Six Convertible Brougham, with a special gold paint job, was featured in Detroit's Jubilee Celebration.

Miller, who calls himself the last Hudson dealer in the country, took on the guardianship of an 1946 Hudson convertible that had returned to Detroit to help celebrate the centennial of the industry. Days before the auto show press preview began, the Hudson enthusiast was talking with anyone who would listen. He wanted to get the gold-colored one-of-a-kind softtop into the show.

"This car was built in Detroit 50 years ago to celebrate the golden anniversary of the auto industry," Miller said. "Back then there was a lot made of the anniversary - there were parades and all kinds of festivities.

"The Golden Jubilee Hudson was awarded to the person who drove the oldest vehicle the farthest to come to Detroit," Miller said.

Winner was George Green, who piloted his 1904 Oldsmobile for Lambertville, N.J. Green owned the Hudson convertible until his death in the early '70s. His widow sold it in 1975 to Glen Johnson, of Brigham City, Utah.

The Society of Automotive Engineers picked up much of the $1,425 it cost to transport the car here," Miller said. "SAE is going to display it at its annual midwinter convention in Detroit."

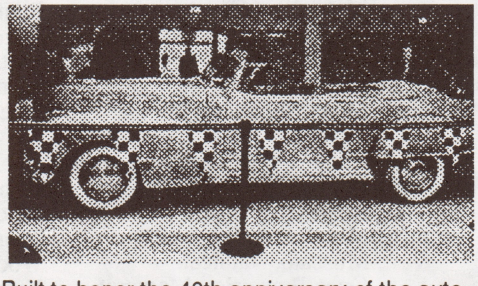
But Miller couldn't bear the thought of the convertible spending a couple of months in storage in Ypsilanti. Especially with the international auto show in Detroit, still the capital of the domestic automobile industry.

Searching for influential people to contact, Miller noticed in the Hudson-Essex-Terraplane Club records that Detroit Chevrolet dealer Jim Tellier had been a member. He then learned that Tellier was co-chairing the dealer-sponsored show. So he gave him a call.

"Tellier quickly saw the importance of this car and said to bring it in, that he would see it gets in the show," said Miller.

Originally it was to have been posted in the cavernous airway outside the show itself. But come press preview days the first week in January, there it was, top down, safe inside the doors on the show floor, in front of a huge Dodge display.

Miller was there, too. His red hair slicked down, and dressed in a tailored navy sport coat with gold buttons, the Hudson dealer glowed as he circled the Hudson Super Six with his point-and-shoot-style camera.



Built to honor the 40th anniversary of the auto industry, this '46 Hudson Super Six barely made it to the Detroit auto show in 1996.

"The industry put on a much more elaborate celebration of its 50th year than it is for its 100th," said Miller. "More than 300,000 people attended the gala opening of the star-studded Jubilee. It was dynamic Detroit proclaiming to the world that it was indeed the Motor City."

The auto show, which featured other historic vehicles, too, ended January 15. Miller said there were no plans to send the Hudson on to Chicago in February.

[Jack's plans, obviously, had to do with keeping the historic vehicle right here in Depot Town, where it will be on exhibit until Labor Day.]

Ypsilanti's Automotive Heritage Museum

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A Depot Town SAMPLER

Survey helps district better serve its clients

As DTA works with EMU to prepare a five-year plan for its operation down by the railroad tracks, it simultaneously surveys the people it serves by asking what they like and don't like about the place. What a radical concept!

Don't look for something like that out at the Mega Malls. While they lengthen the lines and narrow the parking spaces, old districts like Ypsilanti's continue to know most of their customers by name and spend lots of time talking - and listening - to people.

When Sam Walton set about to make his discount store empire into a monster that would put Small Town U.S.A. out of business, some of the affected communities organized themselves to meet the demand of cut-rate prices and no frills. Buyers wanted cheaper prices, but they wanted some service and attention in the process. A "Thank you for shopping at MegaMall" name tag wouldn't work in a neighborhood where you sometimes have to step over a dog to get into a place of business. Warm smiles and recognition made all the difference.

This month's Customer Survey sincerely asks our 'regulars' what works and what doesn't. Why do they spend so much time down between the river and the railroad tracks, when there are acres of asphalt parking lots awaiting them out where grandpa's farm used to be?

But ambiance can't balance discounts, in the long run. Depot Town can be charming, but it has to be a good value, too. Everybody knows value means price, but it means other things, as well. We value familiarity, friendliness, recognition, helpfulness; all are old fashioned ways of doing things.

Depot Town's values reach far beyond mere financial acuteness and perspicacity. The old values that came with this business block sound amazingly like the old Boy Scout Law: trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, cheerful, thrifty, clean, and more. Someone could probably sell that concept in a pole-barn discount mall somewhere, but it's so much easier down here in buildings that are more than one hundred years old. People expect it of us and they seem to fit right in so easily.

And they'll get a chance to say so, too. Be sure to send in your response to the Customer Survey this month, but be careful: someone is sure to recognize your handwriting!

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